



SUCCESS STORY

Vocational Training Helps Youths Find Jobs in Akkar



Young men learn about engines during a WCL auto mechanics training session.

“Before the training, I traveled to Beirut to work as a dishwasher on the weekends, which was getting me nowhere. Now I’m working as a paid intern with a mechanic in Halba and preparing to be a mechanic in the army.”

***—Mahmoud,
a WCL trainee***

March 2009 – Thanks to a grant provided to the Women’s Charity League (WCL), a local nongovernmental organization that offers vocational training to young people in north Lebanon, 60 youths now have jobs.

The grant from USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives provided 120 youths from 20 villages in the economically depressed region of Akkar with practical vocational training in three career fields: hair dressing and makeup, auto mechanics, and cooking. WCL combined the training with internships, giving the youths hands-on experience and making them more attractive candidates for employment.

Prior to the training, Khaled had approached barber shops looking for work, but none were willing to hire him because he lacked experience. “I had lost hope, but finally I have a job doing what I want to do thanks to WCL,” he said proudly.

The training program brought together youths from Alawite, Christian, and Sunni communities that have suffered from recent sectarian clashes. When the training program began, tensions between youths from opposing political coalitions were palpable; however, the program also provided seminars on dialogue, conflict resolution, and civic activism, as well as a three-day camp experience. The activities helped participants learn how to accept each other and even enabled friendships to form across sectarian lines.

WCL Director Hanan El Sayyed said, “The camp was the most valuable experience for the trainees. It built a sense of solidarity between them and taught them how to communicate with one another peacefully. Many of them are still friends and want to form a youth wing within WCL so they can continue to be involved in activities together.”

At the graduation ceremony, folk dancers performed and trainees demonstrated the hair-styling and makeup techniques they had learned. Nearly 600 community members attended the ceremony, showing how important the activity was to the area, which has a high level of youth unemployment and sees few cultural events. Several parents expressed their thanks for the program and said how proud they are of their children.

Since the project, WCL has received numerous requests for additional training activities in the region.